DC COMICS
VERTIGO

DOGMOON

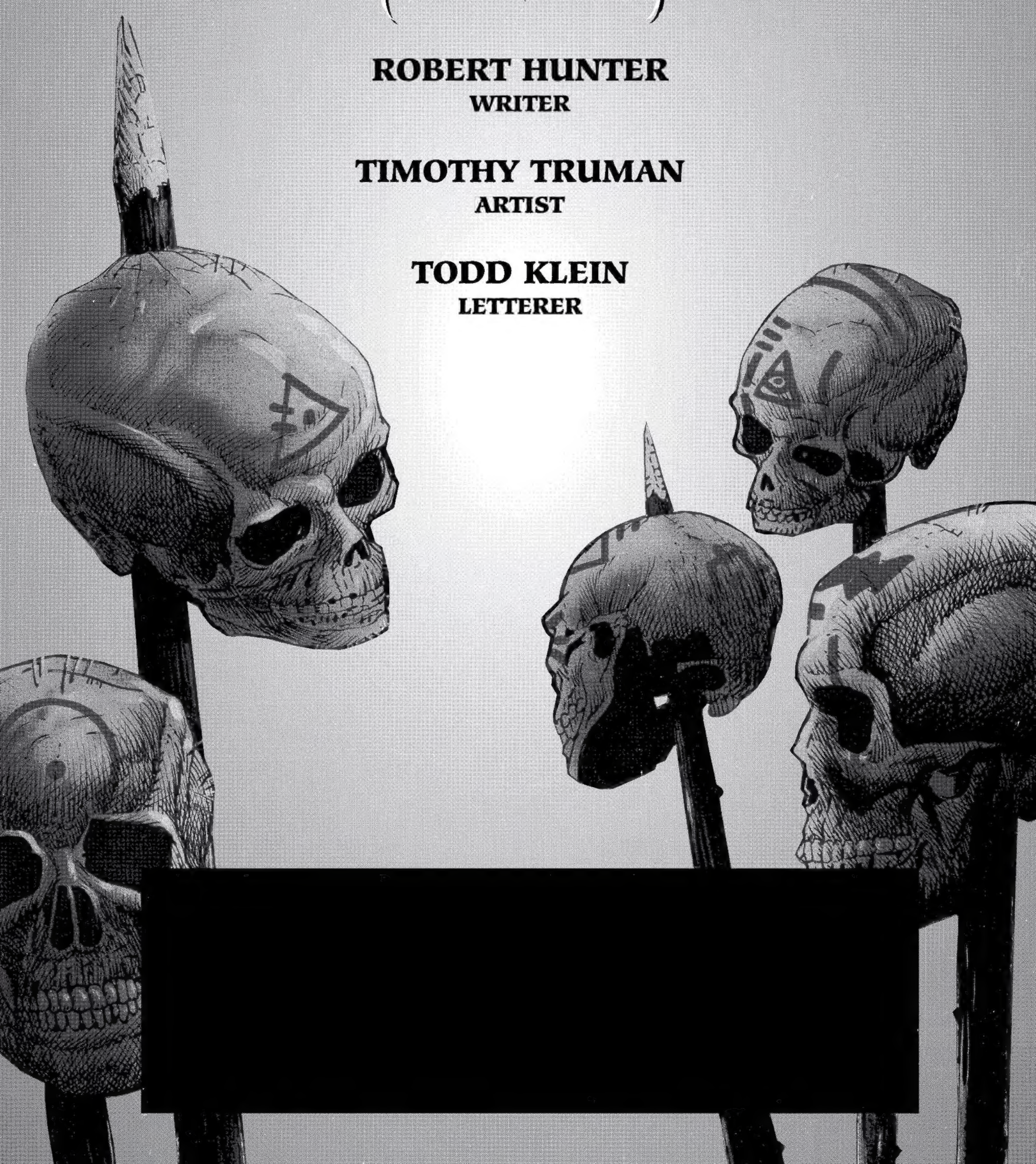
ROBERT HUNTER
TIMOTHY TRUMAN

ANGELMAN

ROBERT HUNTER
WRITER

TIMOTHY TRUMAN
ARTIST

TODD KLEIN
LETTERER



PROLOGUE

A TIDE POOL BY THE SIDE OF THE BLIND SEA WHERE STALKS OF CANE THRASH IN A BREEZE SO SLIGHT A MATCH COULD BE STRUCK AND STILL BURN BRIGHT—

BUT WHEN THE WIND ROARS OUT ITS NAME IN SWIRLS OF SAND ON THE BEACH OF BONES, THE WHITE CANES STAND STARK STILL AS THOUGH SPRUNG FROM SEEDS OF GLASS AND STIR NO MORE.

FROM THE EDGE OF THE TIDE POOL THE PROW OF A RED BOAT STARES OUT TO SEA...

...ITS EYES THE EYES OF A MAID OF HOPE,

A COOL GAZE CUT WITH CLEAN GRACE WHERE A SPARK LIKE LIFE SEEMS TO FLASH FROM HER EYES OF GREEN...

...AS THE WIND BLOWS HIGH.

A SCARF OF WHITE SILK HANGS LIMP FROM THE MAST OF THE RED BOAT...

...A FLAG TO TELL WHAT WINDS RISE AND ROLL THE SEA TO WAVES, YET STIR NO SAILS.

OUT OF THESE DEPTHS THE DEAD COME WHEN THE DOG MOON CALLS...

...THOSE WHO CAN BEAR THE WEIGHT OF NAMES NO MORE;

THOSE WHO RIDE THE RED BOAT TO THE BEACH OF BONES...

...THERE TO MEET WITH ONES WHO CAN LIFT THE PAIN OF FALSE LIFE FROM DEAD HEARTS, TAKE THE NAMES THAT SIT ON THEIR LIPS LIKE SMOOTH WHITE STONES.

The death of the dead ends when this name is thrown to the wind, or let spill like a drop of blood to sink in the earth.

The true dead, dead to death, leave no ghost to walk the world.

They are the chill in the nip of the wind, a veil of moss on the north side of a tree.

A maid of hope at the prow of a red boat, carved from live oak with a spark in the lash of her eye—

Our tale starts here...

PART I

I drive the truck back to base from the Blind Sea leg of the dead soul run, a full load of dead in the back, ten new names in the book.

BASE-3 →
DRIVE SAFE OR NOT

A good night's catch.

©'95 TIMOTHY TRUMAN

Red Jack is spark out from a fight with the things that come out of the night to snatch at our load of souls—

to suck their brains through their ears and eat their eyes with small sharp teeth.

We ran out of gas at the top of the pass and could not coast to the pit stop, due to the curves of the slick steep road in the rain.

So Jack had to beat the things back with an ax while I ran down the slope for a can of high test, breath of a Dog Moon cold on my heels in the hot, hard rain.

I try to write it down, here on my bunk back at the sack out shack with a can of flat beer and some time to kill. Dog Moon down but its howl still a chunk of pain and ice in the back of my mind.

Red Jack split for town to scare up some fun and I hope he finds some 'cause this week's run was right off the map and that boy could use some black out time.

I'd tell more of why we do what we do if I knew, but deep in my heart I feel I'll be the last to know, if I find out at all.

When I ask the boss what gives, all she says is: it all comes clear in time. Could it be if I knew what goes on in back of the store I'd make tracks?

No way.

There's no place to go but town, the high pass and the low strip of land that runs from Deaf Butte to the lips of the Blind Sea.

This is where I fit. I am the job.

The job is me.

That's what it takes to drive the dead. It's not what you call a 9 to 5 but the pay is good and you get to meet a lot of new folks...

DON'T SMOKE

...dead as they may be.

I thought I'd write my gripes and dreams in this log book, try to make sense of what it is sends me down the slope of the pass in the rain, heart in my throat...

...while a Dog Moon snaps at my heels and Red Jack whacks for dear life at the things that come out of the night.

I mean to write of what I see in the eyes of those who give us their names when we pick them up on the road by the Beach of Bones, still wet with the salt slime of the Blind Sea.

Full of tales not to be told...

...'neath a Dog Moon sky.

PART II

One hand on the wheel, one in a can of nuts, Red Jack and me roll out of Base Town to the Blind Sea...

...in search of souls.

An hour out of town we see a dead girl with her thumb out, in full light of day.

That's a new one on me.

The ones I know of sit by the side of the road at night and just wait.

Red Jack says it's a bad sign—

—things should stay the same with them—

the one thing you can count on in this life is that the dead don't change.

Most of the dead are not much to look at but this one has a great face and some kind of spark to her eye-

I'd take her for live if not for her witch white skin.

I hit the brake so hard most of the nuts go right on the floor and Jack has to wipe 'em off one at a time with an oil rag and put 'em back in the can while I get out and ask the girl for her name.

She says "Tess" then shuts up like they all do.

Why will the dead not speak?

I wish one of them would drop some clue to what lies in store that might help when it's my turn to join the dead.

Jack says "stick her in the back" but I say "I saw her first, I want her to sit up front." That's how we work.

Why he would want to stash a drop dead fox like Tess in the back of the truck is hard to suss but he won't say why...

...just wipes the nuts with the same oil rag he blows his nose on and drops 'em back in the can, a grim look on his face.

Tess is less of a mess than most, a fine shape and big green eyes that would knock me down if they weren't set in that blown-out gaze the dead have...

...like they were tuned to some late late show no one else can see.

She wears a scarf of white silk that hides a gash on her throat.

Looks like she could breathe if she felt like it.

"Been long in the rain?" I ask on an off chance.

"Save your breath," says Jack.

Right, but who knows? One of them might spill a thing or two some day.

All we get is names. They got to give us those.

It's in the rules. No name, no ride.

The rules are few: take names, get 'em back to base in one piece, try not to smash up the truck. What's not in the rules is our call.

Tess looks like she'd talk if she could but, like I said, the dead have their own rules.

Shut up and stare seems to be the main one.

Shame when they go so young. Just out of her teens I'd say.

Looks like the type that might not have all that much to say to me live or dead.

Don't have much of a line, but you take Red Jack--

--smooth as snake grease.

He wastes few words, knows what he wants and asks for it point blank.

If he gets a nod, he talks price; if not, he moves on till he finds what he likes the way he likes, at the price he wants to pay.

That won't work for me.

I don't know what I want but if I found it, no price would be too much to pay.

I used to go to town with Red Jack to cool off from the dead run...

...but no more.

When I was new at the job I thought he had some kind of style—

—but I soon found out he was just weird—

—that string of eyes he wears on a gold chain—I found they were real.

Eyes that once could see.

Or that belt of hair and skin he bought strip by strip from a strung-out whore for the shit he deals—

—a drug made from the lymph nodes of girls who died on junk.

Back at the base, they turn a blind eye to most of our tricks, so long as we get the souls we find back in one piece.

All they ask is that we don't lose one, or, if we can't help it, that we have at least a few scars to show that we fought to keep it.

Those who can track the dead are a rare breed— none of us what you might call right in the head.

There's a knack you've got to be born with, some kind of scent to your soul that draws the dead like flies to shit.

Some have that knack but could not see a soul if it were to walk up and spit on their shoe.

Some can see them but the dead run and hide at the sight of them.

You've got to have both skills to drive the dead, that's why we're rare, but you can't do it day in and day out and keep both skates in the rink.

They say it gets all of us in time.

Jack's been on the dead run twice as long as me and shows all the signs:

he just stuck a nut up his nose and blew it splat on the dash with a good hard sneeze.

He gets a big kick out of that.

Some of the stuff he does with the dead would make your blood freeze, but I won't tell what's not mine to tell.

He's got a right to be weird.

Like I said, all of us who drive the dead are three cups short of a quart...

...of that you may be sure.

I hope Jack keeps his hands off Tess.

There's some things I don't like to see, and this guy's just the guy to show me.

Red Jack's got a lot of class, all of it low.

But when you drive the dead you can't go waste your strength on small shit or next thing you know your nerve goes and you don't want that—

—not out on a soul run,

with a dry tank at the top of the Pass where the things that come out of the night wait to suck blood while you live...

...your soul when you die,

where the Dog Moon howls with a cry so full of loss it brings tears to a dead man's eye.

PART III

The Boss says Tess goes with us on the day's run!

Red Jack *shits* but grabs the chance to ask for a raise—

—what's more he gets one to keep his big mouth shut.

Me, I'd trade Tess for Jack in a flash just to be rid of the weird son of a bitch.

That said, though: I don't mind if Tess comes with us, I've got to ask: *what in the hell gives here?*

Why would they send a dead girl on the soul run?

What do they want her to do out there?

She can't cook and the dead are no fun to fuck, so Jack says—

he gave it up when he caught clap twice in a row

and he won't use skins.

Not that he minds a bit of the cold on the side

but Doc says if Jack gets clap one more time his dick will drop off—

I don't want to be the one to tell him that's not the way things work.

Off we drive while the dead girl stares and Jack won't say word one.

Nice pair.

"Hey Jack, what would you say if I told you I once had this dog who could climb trees?"

"I'd say fuck you," says Jack. Fine.

Not much luck this run. My sense of the dead is not too keen and Jack is in such a foul mood he can't raise what it takes to spot dead skin on a ring round the tub.

We find a few sad souls you don't need a nose for the dead to spot—

—one with no head who can't say his name, so we just leave him where we found him.

It's in the rules—

—no name, no ride.

If he could find his head to speak with, we'd pick him up...

...but with no eyes to look out for it he's a lost cause.

We found half a pair of twins who would not give us her name.

Some twins, not all, share one soul and both must die for it to give up its name.

Could be a long wait. The dead don't care. Not so you can tell.

The more you see of a Dog Moon, the more time folds up for you.

Parts touch that are not quite here and not quite there— bits of the past slip out of their stream.

Like, it seems I've known Tess all my life...

...where I might look at Red Jack and, for a flash, not know him at all.

Odd, how she seems to put the fear in him.

Could it be he knows, deep down, that she'll cause him grief, knows it in some hint of time to come that folds in to touch him now?

Tess stares at a spark that hangs in the air, a point of white fire that floats in and out of her eyes.

Nice trick.

Her silk scarf slips from the gash on her throat...

...and, slow as a drop of rain slides down a pane of glass, her hand moves to put it in place—

—but the scarf slips back down her breast as though with a will all its own.

She pulls it back in place a few more times, then lets it do what it wants.

Inch by inch it creeps down her smock and drops to the floor.

We hit a bump which wakes Red Jack with a start.

He looks long and hard at Tess, then shouts:

"Why the fuck do we got to bring this dead bitch on the run?"

What's to say? I shrug and keep an eye out for shapes in the dark.

Jack glares at the spark that hangs bright and still in the dark of the cab— growls: "What's with the light show?" I don't speak.

He sulks and fumes for the half hour it takes to make up his mind.

"Well, if you got to take up space, least you can do is give me some skin," he growls at Tess as he yanks at the neck of her smock and tries to cop a feel from the dead girl—

—but her breast comes off in his hand.

"Shit!" says Jack and slaps the tit back on her rib cage where it melts in place with no mark at all to mar her cold pale skin.

"Guess she's not your type," is all I can find to say, half in rage and half with a held back urge to laugh at the shock on his face.

"I'd say you don't know your butt from a buck's worth of dog shit," says Jack. He might be right.

Let's just say I hold the yen to maim in check and keep both hands tight on the wheel and off his throat.

Tess just sits there and stares, the spark of light gone back in her eyes...

...which glow green as a cat in the dark of the cab.

I spot two lone souls, get their names and call it a day...

...drive up the grade to the Pass where the things that come out of the night wait at the edge of sight...

...grim red eyes like half dead coals in the dark.

Near the top of the Pass Jack lets go with a scream to put a soul from Hell to shame—

— I jolt to a stop, see him hack at his groin with a buck knife blade as he gags in the clutch of a man's most dire pain.

Seems the silk scarf has crept up his pants leg and wound tight as a wire round his balls.

As Jack hacks at the scarf and the scraps fall to the floor, the cut threads put out thin beams of light—

—the shreds of cloth knit back to a whole, crawl up the dead girl, drape round her neck and veil her pale breast.

Now that is some rag!

Is that a smile I see play at the edge of her lips? Or is it my own eyes that read what I'd like to see in the cast of her gaze?

No time to tell for sure—

the things that suck on the souls of the dead see we've come to a stop and try to put the snatch on the feast in the bed of the truck, just as the Dog Moon crowns the Pass.

I slam the truck in gear, haul ass down the steep grade while the things with no name scream and curse in tune with the wail of the Dog Moon.

If they'd just let us put a cage on the truck— but no, that's not how it's done.

The things have some role of their own to play in the sphere of the dead,

and it seems the chance to try to feed on souls is theirs by right, foil them how we will.

Things must be done in the old ways when you drive the dead— it's an old guild— old as they come—

—and the truth of the rules is an old truth lost in the mist of the Blind Sea, the *why* of it hid on the Beach of Bones.

We just drive the dead and do what we're told. Snag 'em, tag 'em and get 'em back in one piece.

Why is not ours to know.

PART IV.

It's pay day and Tess gets the same as me but less than Jack who takes *her* pay and hands me half, which I turn down.

He shrugs, slips it all in his rat skin pouch.

It's been grim all week.

The souls seem to know Tess, flock to her with an ease that saves time on the hunt. They tell their names to *her* now, not to us. Not to say she shows them one bat of an eye more than she shows us.

Less time on the road to catch a full load is a real plus, the way Jack's been since the day we found Tess.

At least he keeps his hands off her once he found what comes of it—

—won't touch her now on a ten buck dare.

I must say I'm glad to have her. We get through the run so fast now, I get more time to write these thoughts down, for one thing. Jack can tell I don't mind her, but the way he sees it, I'm just hard up.

That might be so, in part, but that's not all I feel when I look at her.

What I feel is more than the raw need that gnaws at a man when the Dog Moon gets him so wound a dead soul can look...

...near as good as a pro from a Base Town bar

with three quarts of beer to back light her flaws, fine tune her charms...

...and wash her on down.

Can't say much more. Don't know what it is. But I wish he'd lay off or one of these days...

We roll down Deaf Butte Pass to the Blind Sea and cruise the shore.

Jack spots a child who he grabs by the scruff of the neck...

and flings in back of the truck like a hunk of meat.

"Did you get his name?" I ask.

"Kid can't talk yet," he snarls. "Let's roll."

He can do what he wants since the kid is his find.

I don't know why Jack wants to bend the rules, but that's his ball of yarn.

That's the way we work.

I drive while Jack sulks and fumes. Night falls...

...and the Dog Moon heaves out of the sea with a snarl and a yelp.

"Let's take the kid in the cab," I say "No point to let those things in the Pass get their claws in him."

"They won't if you step on the gas," says Jack. "No room for a kid with this dead bitch up front."

I get it. It's *fuck you* time on the dead run. I blow it at last. This has gone on too long.

"Get out of my face, Jack. You been right in it all week. Tess is not here on my say so and *so what* if she don't bug me the way she does you, that's your gripe not mine— I don't need no shit from you on that count.

"The kid can sit on her lap and you can shut the fuck up!"

Jack looks like a snake just bit him and he's not sure if he should suck at the wound or step on the snake first.

Then, with a kind of sly smile I don't like at all he says "Do what you want."

I stop and get out to move the kid—no sign of things with wings but I move fast, grab the tyke...

...and, just as I reach for the door of the cab...

...may God stab me in the neck if the truck don't roar off in a cloud of dust.

Damn it to Hell!

I'm good as dead with no ax to fight things that come out of the night, just this dead kid for a bat—

I've got no choice but to run till I taste blood.

Jack plays me like a fish—

—slows down, speeds up when I get close—

—drives a ways, then stops.

I give up the game, drop to my knees...

...Jack backs up, brakes, gets out, ax in hand, yanks Tess from the cab by her hair, slams her to the ground.

She lies there, just lies, gaze stuck on that spark of hers.

Jack lifts the ax high, looks my way to make sure he's got my eye, blade a blue glint on the face of the Dog Moon low in the sky—

—lets it fall of its own weight...

...to clip one lock of hair.

He starts to raise it once more as I pull strength from some deep source...

...to owe,

to catch his arm as the ax falls and spoil his aim—

the blade nicks her neck—

Jack spins with that sly smile grown wise on his lips, lets go with a knee to my groin...

...and tops it off with the flat of the ax on the back of my skull.

The rest is a whirl of stars and a big black train that screams with hot red steam.

I come to, near blind with pain, tied face to face with Tess, both of us nude, my arms bound round her with the white silk scarf, so tight it cuts off the blood.

"I think you're too soft for this job," laughs Red Jack. "Time to show you got what it takes!

"Let's see you give it to the dead bitch! Give it to her good and hard if you want me to cut you loose!"

Face to face with Tess I see the spark from her eyes dance close to my own. It seems to make the pain in my head lift—which leaves room for rage.

But in spite of the sheer hate that wells in my gut for Jack, a voice in my head says:

I could just do what he tells me to do and the blame would be all his—

I've been bad in my time, no worse than some, but not as low as *that* and the thought shames me, shames me so bad I want to kill the man who brings me to this. And I will— if he can't kill me first!

Tess is so cold that I feel her chill seep through to my heart and down my spine.

It runs through my nerves till my soul goes as numb as my tight bound wrists— the rage in my heart dies like a hot coal laid in the snow.

This is not the first time I've felt how it feels *not to feel at all* but I can't think where else it might have been.

I flip through my life like a deck of cards but find no one place, in days or in dreams, I did less than *feel*.

I see all of it in a range of mind where no sight seen in my life has been lost or found to fade, where each shines with its own light— fresh as the day that gave it to sight.

I can't *feel*: that's why I can see it. I can't *feel* at all which is why I can see all of it.

Sights to bring joy, sights to bring pain, all sail clear in the blue sky of my mind.

To feel would be to cloud it.

Each stone on a path, each face in a crowd, each dream that was lost when I woke and tried to reel it back in vain,

all of it here, now, as it was...

...and just as it was it is—

the words, the sights, the sounds of one life...

...that do not mean but are in a vast way...

...a way too big to find room in a mind so full of the ways to feel...

...ties to the beat of the heart.

I see the carved head of a Maid of Hope at the prow of a red boat...

...which is not in my past but seems to lie in a new place...

...a place yet to be,

and Tess is there, a child in her arms...

...Tess in the bow of the boat, in the eye of my mind, as well as here in my arms and soul...

...where hearts join like sparks fused in a block of ice...

...where sight is no more than a bruise on the face of light...

...where the dead, who are all of us, born or to be, dwell in the past, in the first day and the last, in one long day both small and vast.

It is good to live

and good to feel

and good to be dead and not feel...

...but to see—

it's as good to see as it is to feel, but...

...it is not the same.

Where there are no words time does not pass.

Where there is no time— there the dead go when their names are told,

where I go,

in the arms of my soul, face to face in the night.

But wait! My name is still my own, I've not yet let it go...

...though I know I've just been asked for it.

I feel my name— the pain it brings rings me out of the sleep of time as the spark that glows in the eyes of Tess lets go its hold and I float to the top of a sea of light to face a Dog Moon—

—and know I must fight!

Red Jack pops a beer, slugs it down quick, pops a fresh one, bolts it, gets up to take a leak, seems not to hear *what I hear* from way off—

—pulse beat of wings from the Dog Moon sky.

Half way through his piss he hears it. No time to zip, he grabs the ax, flays at the thing, too drunk to make a clean kill with one swing.

While Jack does the dance of death in the dark with an ax, I feel the bonds of my wrists go slack—

—both hands slip free as the knot melts out of the white silk scarf.

I roll with the dead girl to our heap of clothes...

...grab my knife from the belt of my pants, slice the rope at our legs.

My feet have gone numb.

Jack sees me try to stand, knows a choice must be made to fight the thing with no name or bash my head in first—

—he sees I've got my knife.

He goes for me since I'm on my feet now...

...the calm of the dead a thing of the past...

...as my knife glints in the truck lights...

...pain like thick fire in the veins of my legs.

Red Jack starts to close, the sly smile spread to a mad slash of hate...

...as he takes one step, trips, and falls flat on his face, feet bound tight with the white silk scarf.

The ax flies from his grip, the thing with no name is on him, rips at his neck with its row of fangs that meet and lock in place.

Blood spurts in quick jerks to the beat of Jack's heart as the thing starts to feed.

Robbed of my prey, I raise my blade to give the coup de grâce to Red Jack.

Though the beast stole the fruit of my rage, I can still make sure my face is the last thing Red Jack sees when I plunge my buck knife in his heart and watch his eyes glaze.

But as I lift my blade high to strike, a hand clasps my wrist with pure cold strength—my knife falls to the dirt.

I turn to face Tess and see the spark of her green eyes grown to a cool bright flame.

As I come to my sense my rage leaks like a burst sac of pus to the blood wet ground. What is done is done. Red Jack is good as dead.

There's no way to fix a torn throat with a first aid kit—

I yank the ax from the tree where it stuck from the force of Jack's last swing, whack off the head of the dark thing that sucks at his neck with one clean swipe.

Its teeth stay locked, its red eyes glare as I dig a grave a foot and a half deep with the ax blade and lay Jack to rest with the toe of my boot, kick some dirt in and say a few words:

Dust to dust, shit to shit...

See you in Hell, Red Jack.

Tess sits in the truck, child on her lap~

the scarf hangs loose on her neck but she does not try to fix it in place—

~the wound on her throat is gone.

I get in, turn the key, put it in gear and drive.

PART V

I sit on a rock here at the Beach of Bones with this log in my lap and write what I can of all that went down.

I've lost track of days and nights, can't say how long it's been since Tess, Red Jack and I left base—nor do I know if my fate is to go back to drive the dead—or if it's my lot to join them.

The dance of death fades from my mind...

...but the lure of the spark that lit up my past, brought it to my lips like a cup from which I could sip the full taste of my days, stays.

Tess stands by the lip of the Blind Sea, the dead child in her arms.

They share the spark from her eyes—I know what they share—I've seen it.

If I could touch her so the warmth of blood from my heart could flow to hers...

...though it leaves my own blood cold, I'd do it in trade for my own spark of her kind cool light that sees through time.

As I write, a gust of wind grabs the white scarf from Tess, flies with it down the beach.

She makes no move to claim it from the wind...

...but turns— slow as a rose tracks the sun— to look in my face.

Our eyes meet, the spark flares, fades and dies.

I have no doubt she can see me.

I close my book and say her name.

She can't or she won't speak to me.

I touch her face. Ice to the roots of her hair.

She smiles. I feel hope. The smile is not cold.

"Are you still dead?" I ask.

The smile fades to a stare.

That's right. They don't come back. Why should they?

Red Jack was right.

I have gone soft.

"Tess," I say, "how can I give you some of my life?"

The stare fades. She looks me right in the eye, seems to search for a trace of doubt, but finds none. I'm sure of what I say.

She puts down the child and comes to me, lays her cheek on mine, so cold, as are the lips which seek my own.

I have no wish but to let her drink my life, as sweet song strums the bud of my brain, blooms like a rose of love on a stem of light...

...but her lips part from mine and the thrall dies.

I reach to hold her once more—

—she shakes her head, looks at my hands...

...not a young man's hands as they were when our lips met.

I feel a sweet surge rise out of my heart and pass through my lips to hers.

Once more my past grows bright in sight of my soul— blue sky of mind, out of time with no pain or death to cloud the pearl sun.

IS THIS WHAT YOU WANT? WILL YOU GIVE MORE OF YOUR YOUTH TO PUT LIFE IN ME?

Her voice is faint and seems to drift from a far place, the mere ghost of words.

I think of what my life is: back and forth from the Blind Sea to haul the dead. What do I have to lose that's as sweet as what I may gain?

"Do you want my name too?" She shakes her head, smiles, then steps out of her smock, lets it fall to the black sand and tilts her face to be kissed, eyes the same green as the sea that laps the shore.

Her face, though not warm, has lost its chill—her lips grow hot as they drink the life that flows out of my heart in a glad tide of joy.

I feel the heat of my blood grow cool, see the full flush of my life light her skin as our lips part, as I sink to the beach, the crash of waves in my ears, as dark falls with a clank of chains and the Dog Moon heaves full and red from its nest in the Blind Sea.

Her flesh gleams like rose pearl as she picks up the child, sets foot in the surf that rolls with a hiss to meet her.

She dips the child in foam then comes back to where I wait, puts the boy down in the sand near me, looks in my eyes, deep as a look can go, and I see the spark of her eyes flare once more, leap from her eyes to mine where it sinks in the bones of my soul.

She leaves it with me.

Words fail me just as they do the dead. Tess turns back to wait for the tide of the Blind Sea to rise.

The tide grows to her knees, to her waist, then she falls on a wave, is lost to sight...

...as the sun sets and the Dog Moon breaks its bond of clouds to scale the dark sky.

The child's eyes lock on the spark Tess left in trade for the life I gave of my own free will.

I wait for an hour, two, three or more, I don't know, time has lost all its feel.

The waves crash and roll while the Dog Moon sings of the long lost past, tales of the death of time that hold no taste of fear for me.

The past is not gone.

It lives in a place where the light is kind, in the clear blue sky of mind.

It's time for me to go. I have a job, or I think I do. I drive the dead.

I'll go find some.

I rise to my feet with what strength I've got.

A tug at my foot— the silk scarf, back from its run with the wind, binds my leg to a drift log. The bond is weak but my strength is so frail I have no will to fight it.

I stand by the shore with a vague hope.

Will Tess wash back out of the tide or did she take my life to gain strength to leave me, to go back to the dead?

The spark she left me shines, grows bright, flares to a blue flame that lights the stretch of beach where I wait.

The Dog Moon howls so loud it seems the sky must run blood—

—goes still all at once.

Time comes to a stop.

The sea holds its shape as though blown in glass.

I hear the chirp of a night bird...

...from the tide pool where the cane bends flat to the black sand, blown by a stock still wind of stone.

One chirp and no more.

Breath of the wind hangs like seeds of dark light in thrall to the Dog Moon...

...the tide in check, till a sound small as the snap of a twig breaks the spell...

...and the Blind Sea wakes from its dream of the death of tides—

—draws in its breath with a rush of wind that rips low slung clouds from the sky...

...and drowns them in swirls of foam.

Sound mounts from boom to blast to full clap of doom that spews wind and cloud from the maw of the sea to the pit of the sky...

...as a word of sheer grief hurls from the burst vault of the deep...

...a great groan of a roar that builds and builds...

...as waves reach their long gray hands to the Dog Moon then fall back out of the sky...

...with a splash so vast there's no room for sound and all goes still once more—

the name of the sea has been said—

—now its voice falls mute as the voice of the dead—

and borne on a beam of pale green that gleams from the heart of the deep...

the dead step out of the sea.

In waves of flesh they surge to the black sand of the Beach of Bones, rise to the swell and wash of surf...

...slime and green blood of sea things trail in their wake.

Like a rock to split their stream I stand, each soul in turn, with gasp or sigh, lets loose its last faint trace of breath to tell its name to me.

then moves on to cross the spit of sand to the white cane of the tide pool where it fades in a bloom of light.

How long the dead flock to shore to speak their names I can't say...

...but as the last soul melts into the sweet gold light that takes it in, like the long lost words to a song that can at last be sung...

the sea heaves a soft sigh of spray as though to say 'good night.'

The scarf lies loose at my feet. I'm free to go.

The moon hangs near the face of the sea in a tight claw of cloud, no more a Dog Moon but the old moon, calm, clear and full.

Scarf at my neck, I lay the dead child in a rush of foam.

"Time to go home," I say as a small hand of wave takes his—

the spark falls from my eyes to go with him.

Jack was wrong to pick him up in the first place.

The child did not give us his name, was not ours to claim, nor is he mine to keep now.

Rules are rules. I am old and I drive the dead.

It's time to go.

I start the truck as the moon slips to the edge of the sea.

The shape of a ship, drawn in ink of blood, sails past its face—

a boat from the moon.

I do not go yet but watch while the moon sets.

The boat does not set with it, but draws near in the false dawn, a Maid of Hope cut in her prow.

A girl stands by the stern, child in arms.

I don't know them. She's a young girl, just past her teens—

the child laughs, waves its hands.

It seems that it waves to me—though I'm too far back to be seen.

The girl beams too, as though she knows me—

first sun breaks as the boat grounds on the spit of sand by the tide pool and rests in white cane.

A young man slams the door of a truck and runs down the bank to meet them.

I should have heard him drive up — my ears aren't so good at my age — or else he slept in his truck.

If so, what did he see of what I saw?

Was it there to be seen? I don't know. To him it would be a dream if he saw at all —

— the live can't tell the warm sea spray of a dream from the cold depths of the dead.

No, he did not see. How could he?

It was all long, long in the past

when I was a young man

who fell in love with a dead girl.

Part VII

I run down the bank to meet Jess and our boy.

She looks good for her sail, mouth red, cheeks flush, the tear cut gem she wears at her throat gleams like a drop of blood as our child tugs its chain.

I see an old man in a black truck who writes in a book and seems to watch us...

"Do you know who he is?" I ask Jess—

she says, "I don't."

I say, "You don't see folks out here much."

She says, "No you don't."

EPILOGUE

At the top of the pass I stop the truck and get out to grab a quick nap near the spot where Red Jack got his due back in days of old.

I dream of Tess who comes to me and says:

"You were dead to me as I was dead to you.

"You shared what you thought was your life with me... So cold was the death I drew from your lips I had to go wash it in the sea to thaw your name from the ice that bound it.

"But this I do when I sail with the dead who cling to their names. Like a thief I must come from out of the light to steal their pain.

"I came to fetch you when you fell to the things that flew out of the night as you ran down the slope of the pass by light of a Dog Moon back at the death of time.

"...came to ease the pain that made you cling to your name, to help you dare to give it up, to trick it from you if such must be the way.

"You're safe in the past now, where I'm yours when you want me...

"...as the world is yours when your name is torn from the eye of the soul and can hide the past from the heart no more."

I wake from my nap and dab the blood from my throat with the rag of a silk scarf, get back in the truck.

I see a side road at the foot of the Pass, one I'd not seen all the times I came this way.

I turn down it, day thick with stars, sweet with the scent of wild thyme.

Tess smiles from a breeze that stirs the pine, and I smile back at her.

It's good to be where dreams are real as those who dream, to be one, at last, with all you love, death no part of the shape of sky...

...Dog Moon set no more to rise from the Blind Sea...

...where souls come to drink their fill of tears.

© TIMOTHY RUNYAN

12:50p 12.7.95

AFTERWORD

Dog Moon came out of the fevered imaginations of a short-term illness. The story poured forth as though reported to me; the characters seemed to go about their business with a will of their own. I just followed and annotated what was present in my head. There were very few junctures when it was given me to decide direction. Once the big black truck took off for the Beach of Bones, I was just a rider–amazed and sometimes horrified at the events that unfolded.

The process didn't stop when I ceased writing for the night, but continued on through my dreams. I would awaken knowing what happened next and get right to work setting it down, learning even more details in the act of writing. The story continued to seem deeply real until at last it was finished and "out of my system."

Rendering it as a comic was Tim Truman's idea. He called during the process and asked what I was writing lately. I read him some of the strange work in progress. "I'd sure like to draw that," he said. And did. Tim had been my favorite artist in the "Grateful Dead Comics" series. Of many fine artists who'd rendered my lyrics, his version had been most resonant with my own.

Though the story wrote itself, the choice of scribing it in monosyllables was mine. The story was, somehow, the product of the technique. As I concentrated on finding the right single-syllable words, they seemed to *conjure*–much in the manner of a shaman's drum: he need only attend to the beat while the visions present themselves.

It's my theory that single-syllable words cut past the intellect to address a deeper stratum of the brain; that the seat of both beauty and horror dwells in those levels and can be addressed directly. It is my hope that Dog Moon conjures both emotions truly and that the brain of the reader will resonate to the same deep rhymes which evoke the tale.

©'95 TIMOTHY TRUMAN

--Robert Hunter

ROBERT HUNTER:

I cut my teeth writing for the Dead, but was weaned on comics. Dad said I could buy two comics for every good book I read, so I read the Classics Illustrated versions of the books and made out OK. My first, but not last, exposure to the Great White Whale, Raskolnikov, Sidney Carton, etc. was through the vision of comic artists.

So, with DOG MOON, there is a sense of homecoming.

TIMOTHY TRUMAN:

Penciller/cover artist, came to prominence as the artist of the comic GRIMJACK and proceeded to become one of the field's foremost writer/artists through such projects as HAWKWORLD, winner of Haxtur award 1991, GRATEFUL DEAD COMICS and the Bram Stoker award-winning JONAH HEX: TWO-GUN MOJO. Timothy lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with his wife Beth and children Benjamin and Emily.

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"